

4.2.6 (i.) 29

9 *The duty of professing Christians to promote the success of the Gospel Ministry.*

THE
CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE
MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS
OF THE

BAPTIST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

By James STATEDLY MEETING *Hinton*

WALCESTER, Warwickshire; BOURTON on the Water, CAMPDEN, and FAIRFORD, Gloucestershire; OXFORD, BURFORD, CHIPPING-NORTON, HOOK-NORTON, COAT, and WITNEY, Oxfordshire; and SHIPSTON upon Stour, Worcestershire:

Receiving the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as their only guide in faith and practice; and thence deriving their belief in the important doctrines of Three Equal Persons in the Divine Essence—Eternal and Personal Election—Original Sin—Particular Redemption—Free Justification by the Imputed Righteousness of Christ—Efficacious Grace in Regeneration—The final Perseverance of Believers—The Resurrection of the dead—The last Judgment—The everlasting punishment of the Impenitent, and happiness of the Righteous:

ASSEMBLED AT OXFORD, JUNE 4th & 5th, 1811:

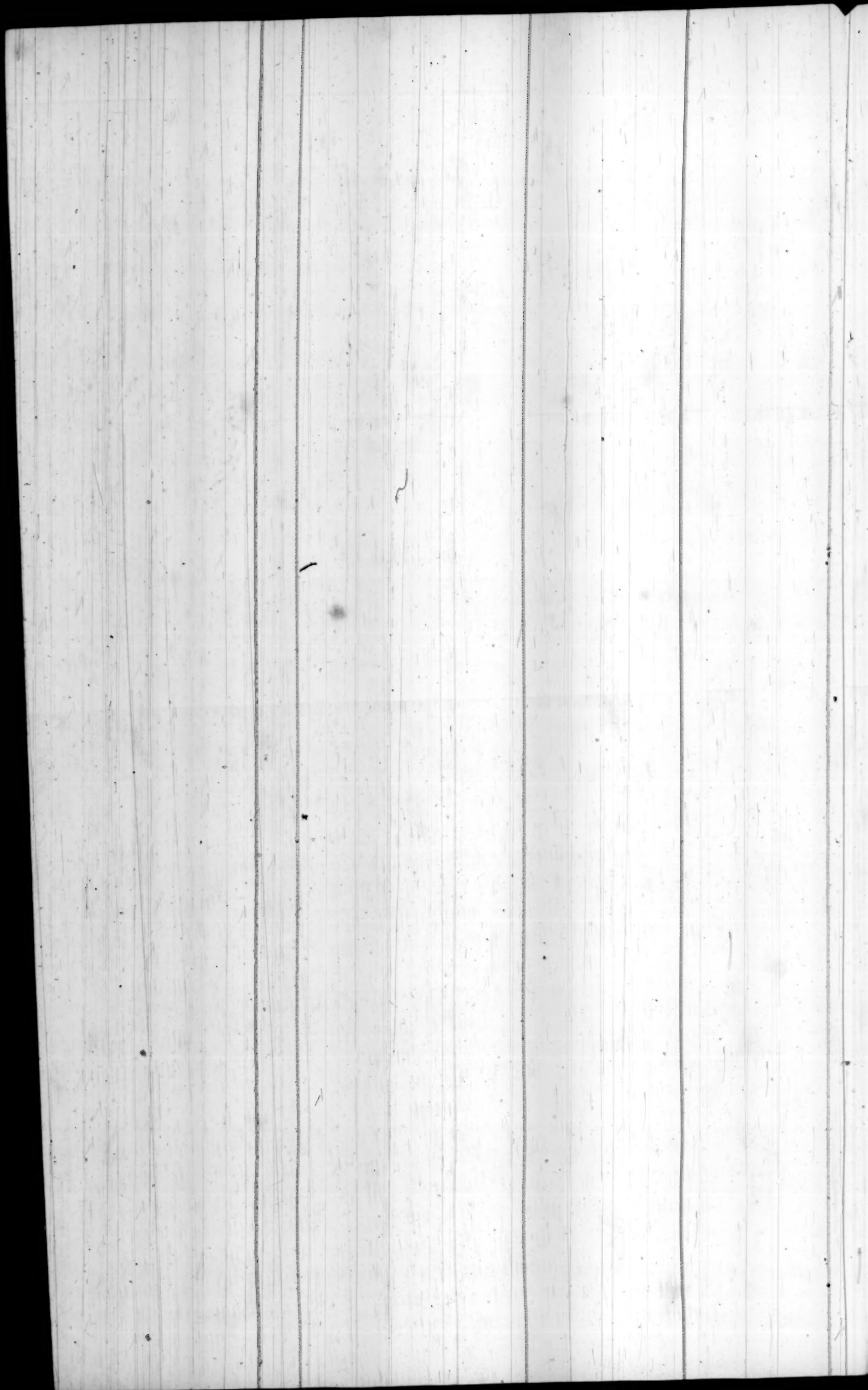
TO THE SEVERAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES WHICH THEY
REPRESENT.

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CIRCULAR LETTER,

&c.

Dear Brethren,

OUR annual address will meet you advancing, as we trust, under the direction of our heavenly Leader, to his eternal kingdom and glory. Permit us to congratulate you on the progress you have made, and to wish you all prosperity through the remaining part of your Christian course. As your companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ, we cannot but rejoice that by each departing year the number of our trials and temptations is greatly diminished, whilst the hope of their final and happy termination is brought closer to our view. But departed years speak the language of exhortation as well as of comfort: they eloquently enforce the precepts, *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might* *; *See that ye walk circumspectly, redeeming the time, because the days are evil* †.

Reflections like these suggested to us the subject of our present address. Aware that our days are *like the shadow that declineth* ‡—that our ministerial course among you must speedily close—and desirous that our labours may be finally crowned with a large success, we earnestly and affectionately call on our fellow Christians to afford us every suitable aid—to *strive together with us for the faith of the Gospel* ||. With these views we invite you, brethren, to examine the important question, *How may professing Christians best discharge their obligations to promote the great ends of the Gospel ministry?*

This question assumes as acknowledged truths, that the Christian ministry is perpetuated by divine authority—that it is designed to accomplish very important purposes—and that it is the duty of professing Christians at large to use every means in their power to promote its success. These are propositions which cannot indeed be denied, consistently with a professed belief in the authority of the New Testament: yet it will not be improper to take a brief survey of the evidence on which they rest.

* Eccles. ix. 10. † Ephes. v. 16. ‡ Psalm cii. 11. || Phil. i. 27.

▲

If the first promulgation of the gospel of Christ is justly regarded as the highest favour that divine benevolence could bestow on a rebellious world, our gratitude is no less due for the continuance of this blessing to succeeding generations: since the value of the soul and the glory of its redemption are not at all affected by the revolutions of time; but remain through every age the same.

The first preacher of the gospel was *the Lord from heaven**: this great office engaged his heart and "filled his hands." He who in compassion to the ignorant took on himself *the likeness of sinful flesh*†, committed also the ministerial office to *men of like passions with ourselves*‡, and sent them on an embassy of mercy to their fellow sinners. Go, said he to his disciples, (while thousands of angels waited around, and a bright cloud lowered itself to the earth to receive the Lord of nature, and bear him to his heavenly throne,) *Go, preach the gospel to every creature*||. But this commission was too large for one or for many generations to fulfil. Into a field thus extended other and more numerous labourers must enter, in order to bring forth the fruits thereof in due season. Accordingly we are assured§ that our Lord immediately after his ascension to heaven, gave many teachers and pastors to his churches: fulfilling the prediction, *The Lord gave the word, and great was the company of them that published it*¶. With the same view of perpetuating the ministerial office, Saint Paul was commissioned to leave on record many directions to pastors and to churches, to guide them in the choice of *faithful men who should teach others also**. This office is also appointed for *the perfecting of the saints, the edifying of the body of Christ, till all come to the unity of the faith*†; a work that certainly extends to the second coming of our Lord; or to use his own words, *to the end of the world*; (Matt. xxviii. ult.) an expression which in this place as well as Matt. xiii. 39. evidently refers to the end of time‡.

The institution of the gospel ministry forms a very prominent part of the Evangelical Economy; and the end designed thereby is worthy of the appointment. Our Lord *ascended to glory that he might fill all things*||—that he might take upon himself the whole government of his church; and his first and greatest care is to promote its increase and prosperity by raising up men for the work of the ministry. This is the grand means which God

* 1 Cor. xv. 47. † Rom viii. 3. ‡ Acts xiv. 15. || Mark xvi. 15.
§ Eph. iv. 12. ¶ Psalm lxviii. 13. * 2 Tim. ii. 2. † Eph. iv. 12, 13.
‡ Doddridge, Hammond, Beza, Grotius, &c. || Eph. iv. 10.

hath chosen, and which he employs in the hand of his Spirit, to support, extend, and complete the kingdom of the divine Redeemer.

On the work of the Holy Spirit in converting sinners unto God the existence of the church of Christ on earth depends. The Redeemer has not one disciple in whose heart the Holy Spirit does not dwell; who is not regenerated by *the word of the truth of the Gospel* *. By this ministry of reconciliation the majesty of heaven condescends to recall apostate man to his allegiance, and confirm him in his obedience. By this (rendered *mighty through God* †,) the strong holds of Satan are thrown down; and ministers triumph in Christ, while they *make manifest the savour of his knowledge* ‡ in every place to which their influence extends. To faithful ministers who have been thus employed the Judge of all the earth will appeal as his witnesses at the last day, while, directing to them the attention of those who had despised their ministry, he will say, *By these I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hand but ye regarded not* ||: this is your condemnation;—*ye received not the truth in the love of it, that ye might be saved* §.

From the foregoing considerations it would appear that our Lord accounts very highly of faithful ministers, and is greatly interested in their success; and it follows as a necessary consequence, that an object thus dear to him ought to be so in the esteem of all who profess to love him. But plain as this inference is, it does not seem to occur to the minds of professing Christians with as much frequency and force as might be wished. There are, we fear, too many in whose minds the general welfare of religion excites but a small degree of interest. Satisfied, it would appear, if their individual happiness be secured, they are reluctant and irresolute when called upon to exert themselves for the public good. Yet the period will come when to have laid one stone in the temple of God, shall be accounted a greater honour than to have founded an empire amongst men.

One of the first maxims that Christianity teaches is, that none of Christ's disciples *liveth to himself, or dieth to himself* ¶. Our own salvation is indeed a great and noble object; but there is one far greater, and far more noble; it is that of promoting the glorious honour of *his kingdom* who redeemed our souls from death, whose perfect righteousness is the robe of salvation that arrays every saint, on whose faithfulness and truth millions rest their immortal hope—and whose glory it will be the work of heaven to

* Col. i. 5.

† 2 Cor. x. 4.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 14.

|| Prov. i. 24.

§ 2 Thess. ii. 10.

¶ Rom. xiv. 7.

pursue through eternal ages, when the salvation of the church shall have been accomplished and for ever secured. Can love be deaf to the exhortation, *Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price**? Can gratitude relinquish the enquiry, *What shall I render to the Lord†*? Or forget the reply, *In as much as ye render service to my brethren, ye render it unto me‡*? But without further proof you must be well convinced, brethren, that nothing is so estimable in the sight of our Divine Master as the interests of his church; that nothing can so effectually promote its prosperity as the success of the Gospel ministry; and that activity and zeal directed to this object must be highly pleasing in his sight. When you gave your own selves to the Lord by a public profession, you gave yourselves also to his church according to his will||; your interests then became those of the whole church, and those of the whole church became yours; for we are members one of another§. It is not enough that ministers are faithful in their work; it is your part by every suitable exertion to hold forth the word of life, that we may not labour in vain¶. There is a conduct on the part of religious professors (Saint Paul assures us) by which the preaching of the cross may be made comparatively of none effect*, while by means of an opposite and more consistent character the word obtains free course, and runneth and is glorified†. Christians of eminent piety are always spoken of in the New Testament as the companions and supporters of those who were set over them in the Lord. Such were the house of Onesiphorus who oft refreshed the Apostle, and were not ashamed of his chain‡: such were they who forwarded on their way after a godly sort, those who for Christ's name sake went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles||.

Animated by such examples, ye, brethren, will not be slothful, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises§. Fully sensible as you must be of your high obligations to promote the great ends of the Gospel ministry, permit us to hope also, that you will read with serious, patient, and candid attention, the directions which we now lay before you, with a view to aid you in the discharge of this important duty.

As preliminary to every other direction on this subject, permit us to recommend that you cherish towards your respective pas-

* 1 Cor. vi. 20. † Psalm cxvi. 12. ‡ Matt. xxv. 40. || 2 Cor. viii. 5.
§ Rom. xii. 5. ¶ Phil. ii. 16. * 1 Cor. i. 17. † 2 Thess. iii. 1.
‡ 2 Tim. i. 16. || 3 John 7. § Heb. vi. 12.

tors a cordial attachment, a sincere and affectionate regard. This will render you watchful and prompt to communicate to them every suitable aid in their work: but if this be suffered to decline, a spirit of disunion and indifference to the public good will rapidly succeed.

Your ministers are also your fellow christians, and in this character you are commanded to *love them with a pure heart fervently* *. They suffer personal afflictions in common with their brethren, and on this account they equally need the soothing consolations of pious friendship. But the ministerial office, you well know, necessarily exposes them to peculiar trials; and as one of their principal supports, the great Head of the church has adjudged to them a double share in your esteem. Were they indifferent to this privilege they would be utterly unfit for their sacred employ. *Receive us, brethren*, said the Apostle, *for we have you in our hearts* †. Did the first ministers of Christianity, then, seek the friendship of the churches on any worldly account? Of this you will not suspect them. They could say, *God is witness, we seek not yours but you* ‡; yet how exquisitely sensible were they of the least alienation of affection, displayed in the conduct of christian professors, and with what affectionate expostulation did they endeavour to recall it! *Where*, said they, *is that blessedness that ye once spake of* ||? Are we now accounted *enemies because we tell you the truth*? Worldly men would censure this language as indicating meanness and pusillanimity; it is, however, the offspring of that noble generosity which is every where inculcated by the gospel of Christ, and of which he was himself a perfect pattern; and this temper of mind a minister will ever imbibe in proportion as *the grace of the Lord Jesus is with his spirit* §. If you discern this disposition in those who are set over you, cherish it by every suitable return, and account it an invaluable privilege bestowed by the Head of the church, if he has given you pastors who will *rejoice in all their tribulations, when they know the love which you have towards them*.

This affectionate regard to your ministers cannot be maintained without a frequency of friendly intercourse with them. Carefully improve, brethren, for this purpose, those short and transient opportunities which providence usually administers to all who watch for their approach. The multiplied engage-

* 1 Pet. i. 22. † 2 Cor. vii. 2. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 14. || Gal. iv. 15.
§ Philem. 25.

ments of a temporal kind which have (we lament to say it) become absolutely necessary to the existence of the greater part of your ministers, render it peculiarly desirable that these fragments of time should be carefully gathered up, for the purpose of communicating to them a just acquaintance with the state of your minds, and receiving from them those admonitions and consolations which it is their duty to impart. Every one knows that in occasional and unexpected interviews more freedom is sometimes enjoyed, than in seasons expressly appointed for spiritual converse. *A word fitly spoken, how good is it*!* When other opportunities are unattainable, the exchange of a well-timed expression in the field or in the market has oft awakened the love which had begun to slumber, and which without such a monitor might soon have become dormant. The injurious suggestion that you are slighted, that your welfare is not the object of your pastor's care, will by such a practice be repelled from the heart; and *the unity of the Spirit* will be preserved *in the bond of peace*†. We beseech you therefore, brethren, to *know them that are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*‡.

Your attendance on the public labours of those whom you have solemnly invited to take charge of you in the Lord forms another important branch of your duty, and in the discharge of it you will see the necessity of constancy, seriousness and spirituality. You will neither vacate your seat in the house of God, nor slumber away the hour in which you fill it. You will go to the sanctuary not to seek amusement, but solid improvement of character. You will desire to hear the *whole counsel of God*||, and that expression you are well aware, comprehends all that you ought to do, as well as all that you ought to believe. You will never ask that the minister, speaking with wisdom as well as faithfulness, should hold back the censure of evil, on whomsoever that censure may rest; nor think it sufficient that the practice of good works be left as a mere inference to be drawn from just sentiments. You will regard the duties of the christian life as forming a large and essential part of the Christian ministry; as requiring constant pains to explain their obligations, and enforce their practice. Your churches, brethren, shall we trust have the honour of prizing most highly those ministers who make the Bible the model of their public instructions, as well as the foundation of

* Prov. xv. 23. † Eph. iv. 3. ‡ 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. || Acts xx. 27

their faith. Such a conduct on your part will greatly promote our success in the Lord.

A desire for the prosperity of your respective pastors will be also manifested in the diligence and holy ardour with which you intercede with God on their behalf, in seasons of religious retirement. *Not a single instance* will probably appear at the last day in which a Christian, daily and earnestly pleading with God for a blessing on the labours of his minister, had not been favoured with soul prosperity as the result of his prayers. May we not hope that every one who reads these lines will immediately and seriously enquire for himself, Is it a part of my daily and solemn requests at a throne of grace, that the Spirit of God would by the ministry under which I am placed impart to me spiritual and eternal benefit?

These directions, brethren, appear to us suited to promote the success of our labours with respect to your own experience: and we have the fullest confidence that in following them you will find us *made unto you the ministers of God for good**.

Our next hope of usefulness in the ministerial work is directed towards the members of your respective families, who regularly attend with you on our public labours. If with these we fail of success great injury will redound to the interests of religion, and the decay of our churches will most likely be the consequence. Great responsibility must necessarily attach to parents and governors of households, who by conducting themselves *wisely in a perfect way*† may greatly promote, or by an opposite conduct greatly hinder, the success of the gospel among those who are placed under their authority or direction. What minister can pass through the labours of a single sabbath without the painful reflection, that he addresses many who as yet *know not God, and obey not the gospel of Christ*‡:—many, whom *if he warn not, their souls shall be required at his hand*||? What family that is at all numerous can piety survey, without lamenting that some at least of its members are strangers to regenerating grace? To these ministerial admonitions must be addressed with wisdom indeed, but with faithfulness too, for *cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully*§. Reproofs to be useful must be addressed to the conscience; and to resent them in order to evade their force, is a common stratagem of the human heart. And is not a disrespectful or censorious expression

* Rom. xiii. 4. † Psalm ci. 2. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 8. § Ezek. xxx. 12.
§ Jerem. xlviii. 10.

uttered by the head of a family respecting the minister on whom he attends, very often considered by children and servants as a sufficient reason for *despising all that minister's counsels, and setting at nought all his reproofs* *? How careful, brethren, should your conduct be in this instance, if you would promote the everlasting interest of those over whom you preside! How venerable is the character of a christian parent who on a Lord's-day evening, surrounded by his family, points out with equal solemnity and gentleness those parts of the public discourses best suited to the age and circumstances of his rising charge! Who calling to his aid the beautiful and appropriate Catechisms of Dr. Watts, or the maturer labours of the Assembly of Divines, enriched by the scriptural commentaries of a Henry or a Beddome, "pours wise instruction on the attentive ear," and silences every rising objection to religion, by the commanding dignity with which he treats its truths, its ordinances and its ministers;—then approaching the family altar (a practice on no day neglected by him, but on this attended to with peculiar devotion) closes the Sabbath with solemn intercession to heaven, and shares the eulogium first bestowed on the Father of the Faithful, *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him that they shall keep my ways* †.

It will further promote the great designs of the gospel ministry if you carefully watch, both in your own families and among your acquaintance, the hopeful commencement of a work of grace on the heart; and, kindly removing the obstacles which you may observe in the path of enquirers, introduce them to the acquaintance of your fellow members and your respective pastors. If the latter should find it necessary to appoint some portion of time every week for these interviews, you will shew by your own conduct that you approve of the measure; and induce others to gather up the advantages which it evidently affords, for conversation and instruction more particular and appropriate than our public labours will allow.

And may you not also, with some hope of advantage, invite us to your houses on the great errand of our ministry? In addition to the more common intercourse of friendship which we have already recommended, may not one or two evenings at least in a year be devoted to the express purpose of receiving pastoral visits? Without any great sacrifice time may be secured, and pains taken to render such visits welcome to your

* Prov. i. 30. † Gen. xviii. 19.

domestics. The Bible is the most dignified ornament of the parlour or the cottage; and the appearance of the family will inform the minister that they are all waiting to hear what *message* he has *from God unto them**. On these occasions, if your pastor be fitted for the duties of his office, he will pour forth not only the advice and consolations of a father or a brother in Christ, but *his own soul also* in prayer to God *for you, because you are dear unto him*†. Thus the first ministers of Christ, and at no very remote period in the history of *our own churches*, *their pastors also*, taught not only in public but *from house to house*‡. If our hearts glow with love and zeal for God we shall earnestly seek, and not in vain, for opportunities in which we may attend to these highly beneficial interviews.

But though we hope much from the success of our ministry in your respective families, yet the work of God must be more widely extended, and new ground must be broken up if we expect the cause of religion to be long sustained. It is from the neighbourhood around that we must look for converts to fill up those vacancies which, through desertion and death, perpetually occur in our respective congregations. Sad experience proves that every pious father *sees not his children walking in truth*||; and such is the will of God, that the name of families once honoured in Zion has often in a few years become extinct. To these considerations may be added the painful conviction, that lukewarmness and formality in too many instances mingle their baleful influence with a regular and long-continued attendance on the ordinances of religion; insomuch that we have seldom beheld a church of Christ enjoy a long series of prosperity which had not activity sufficient to *break forth on the right hand and on the left*§; thus chasing away its own languor, and at the same time opening to itself new sources of supply.

And who that loves the Saviour as he ought can be satisfied to ask and hope that religion shall do no more than maintain the ground which it already occupies? How great a portion of the world is still lying in wickedness! In what part of the counties that we inhabit does not the Sabbath evening present scenes of impiety that should awaken genuine compassion for the souls of our fellow men? In what place is not the ear assailed with the language of profanity, and the eye disgusted by assemblies employed in vicious sports? The Saviour of mankind

* Judges iii. 50. † 1 Thess. ii. 8. ‡ Acts ii. 46. || 3 John 4.
§ Isa. liv. 2.

would have beheld these with the most lively sorrow: he would have said, *I have compassion on the multitude because they wander as sheep having no shepherd**: he does thus behold them, and charges still his servants to go forth and compel them to come in that his house may be filled†. Those ministers of Christ will have a dreadful account to give, who have made no exertions to rescue their fellow men from the awful dangers that await them: nor will the people who in this work refuse to strengthen the hands of their pastors, incur less danger in the day when the buried talent shall be required‡ with its improvement by him at whose hands they received it.

The advantages which private christians possess of bringing their acquaintance and connections under the preaching of the divine word should be carefully improved. In this instance conduct that would be improper in ourselves is highly praise-worthy in our christian brethren. You may seek out proper places for the labours of your pastors, and countenance them by your personal attendance and support. Some christians are favoured with a good degree of worldly property and influence; and their presence at a village lecture would encourage many to attend whom shame or fear might else restrain. Some are endowed with considerable address in conversation—others with frequent intercourse in business: ardent love to Christ will suggest the proper use of these talents, and the Searcher of hearts will justly appreciate the motives which call them into exercise. You cannot, brethren, be ignorant that a minister unattended by his christian brethren in these exertions, has to encounter obstacles which he hardly ever surmounts; and your zeal in opening places of worship is entirely counteracted, if not supported by your presence in them. The labour is usually lost, or the fruits are such as those *with which no mower filleth his hand*||.

In the support which may thus be rendered to the ministry of the Gospel you, brethren, will act with integrity and openness. You will convince all reasonable men that piety, not party, is your object. From serious godliness in whatever form it appears you will seek to make no proselytes; but from vice and a careless neglect of God you will earnestly desire the conversion of your fellow men, by whatever name they shelter the evil of their character, or however diligently they may oppose your benevolent designs. In this part of your duty you must be

* Matt. xv. 32. † Luke xiv. 23. ‡ Luke xix. 23. || Psalm cxxix. 7.

ready both to labour and to suffer reproach * ; for against these exertions the whole power of the enemy is armed, and from the contest many a timid professor retires uttering the coldest maxims of worldly prudence to justify his retreat. Against this work of converting souls to God ridicule and calumny aim their bitterest shafts, with a zeal which ought to excite the emulation of those who are employed in an infinitely better cause. It is here we may safely make the appeal, *Who is on the Lord's side* † ? It is to the most zealous and most beloved of all the churches that the Saviour says, *I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it* ‡ . Our divine Master looks down with approbation on every work and service of love that ye render to his name ; and to encourage you he saith, *Fear not their revilings, for lo I am with you* || .

It has been remarked that those who are most serious and constant in attending on meetings for social prayer, are usually most laborious also for the public good. The consequence seems natural, for prayer is a pledge of obedience ; and he who ardently and sincerely unites in supplication for the spread of the Gospel, will not for light reasons withhold from it his active support. Our exhortations to social prayer have in past years been frequent, and we hope in some measure successful. It gives us pain however to learn, that there are still not a few of the members of our churches who are rarely if ever seen in those assemblies that are *gathered together praying* § for their own prosperity and that of Zion. But will any of you, brethren, persevere in this neglect ? Can you justify it to God or your own consciences ? Are you not sensible that the prosperity of your souls and of the church of Christ is intimately connected with this duty ? Surely you must trace to its omission that sad want of spirituality and that proneness to mingle with the sinful customs of the world, which so many of our members have displayed. *We beseech you, brethren, suffer this word of renewed exhortation* ¶ . We have little hope of success unless ye are found helping together by your prayers * .

Our brethren who gladden our hearts by their constant attendance on these occasions, will permit us to remind them that it is possible to be often at prayer-meetings and yet to pray but seldom. Should we not ask, Where are the desires of the heart during this exercise ? Are the petitions of him who

* 1 Tim. iv. 10. † Exod. xxxii. 26. ‡ Rev. iii. 8. || Isa. li. 7.
§ Acts xii. 12. ¶ Heb. xiii. 12. * 2 Cor. i. 11.

guides the devotion carefully gathered up by each individual, and the silent Amen of the heart attached to them? Is there no reason to fear that God is offended by a heartless offering? Is the wandering of the mind that we acknowledge in this service regarded as a crime, and treated as such? Is a constant opposition to it maintained in the soul? We must be aware that there is no more of *prayer* in our assemblies than there is of *desire* really lifted up to God in this exercise; of lively *faith* in Christ for its acceptance; and holy *watchfulness* for a gracious answer to our requests.

There are also opportunities, in which the members of several churches meet in one assembly for the exercise of prayer and praise and hearing the word of God: and because the distance requires a little time and labour, we lament to say the path which leads to these assemblies often shows "but here and there a traveller." The world can find more time for its pleasures, and make greater sacrifices to attain them, than we can do for ours. Let us learn of them: for *the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light**. A greater degree of zeal in attending on the public meetings and associations of our churches would give us a closer resemblance to those whom we succeed in christian privileges, and render us more useful in the station that God has given us to fill.

It appears to us, brethren, that these are the means which if diligently attended to would render you highly serviceable in promoting the great ends of the Gospel ministry with respect to your own souls, your families, and the world at large. To close this address we shall add some general remarks calculated, as we hope, to increase your usefulness in all the instances which we have hitherto mentioned.

You can scarcely be ignorant, brethren, that while the number of our churches has been enlarged, that of able and faithful pastors has been considerably diminished. In many instances their labours have been suspended by sickness, or terminated by death. While you look to God to supply this distressing deficiency, you will not forget that it is your duty to watch carefully over the youth of your charge, and cherish with equal wisdom and kindness the rising desires which any of them discover to be employed in the christian ministry. Repeat to them the words of inspiration, *He that desireth the office of a pastor† desireth a good work‡*. And where you observe an *aptness to teach*|| superadded to personal piety,

* Luke xvi. 8. † *ἰταροποιεῖν*. Vide Schleusner. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 1. || 1 Tim. iii. 2.

endeavour to remove those discouragements which appear formidable to the timid and self-diffident. The kindness and gentleness of our churches will speak to the heart of those in whom this desire is raised; and if they see Zion a peaceful habitation they will be induced to prize her service above their highest joy. A consideration of the very heavy trials which ministers have to encounter operates very powerfully on the minds of youth, to deter them from engaging in this honourable employ. When any of them become willing to enter on the sacred office, you will do well to afford them every opportunity to devote themselves wholly to it; since without a diligent attention on your part to this important duty our seminaries are not likely to be filled with students, nor our churches supplied with able pastors.

The history of many of our churches if faithfully narrated would give us on this subject very useful instruction. "Our minister," might one record state, "was early called by divine grace, and in his youth became a zealous and useful preacher. His more judicious friends advised him to give himself to reading and study under the direction of aged and experienced ministers, that he might be *thoroughly furnished for** his work. By others this counsel was opposed and in the end rejected. In a few years he became a pastor: the multiplicity of his public labours exhausted his personal strength; and his pastoral duties allowed him scarcely an hour to recruit his mind, or improve his slender store of knowledge. He had to deliver some hundreds of sermons every year, to congregations chiefly composed of the same hearers, and he soon found that they were far from being satisfied with the same things. The attachment of his people gradually died away, and he was greatly distressed at the change. His spirituality, zeal, and ardent love for his flock, could not supply the absence of that diversified information and those habits of arrangement which in his early years he might by patient study have secured, and for want of which the usefulness and comfort of his advancing days were greatly diminished." As ye wish well to the interest of Zion, be anxious, brethren, to train up for God those youth whom he has called to his service: and be willing, whatever the sacrifice may cost, that they should enjoy and improve some years of pious retirement, *till the day of their showing unto Israel*†; in order that they may then read as their own the com-

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.

† Luke i. 80.

commendation of our Lord, Blessed is *that faithful and wise steward* that shall bring forth out of his treasure things new and old †.*

When your ministers have entered on their stated employ be it your care, brethren, to unbind their hands from worldly labour, and their hearts as far as possible from worldly cares. These often depress the spirits, interrupt the labours, and greatly diminish the usefulness, of our most approved pastors; and whether or not any record on earth preserves the recollection of this truth, there is a record above where it will be found and read with lively interest. It is there written of many a faithful labourer now closing his days somewhat prematurely, “He was
“in his youth greatly beloved, and after some years of diligent
“study he entered with trembling joy on the pastoral office.
“Of temporal advantage he never thought, for his labour was
“his reward. His ministry was owned of God, the church
“rapidly increased, and his duties of every kind were proportionably multiplied. At home and in the villages around,
“*in season and out of season ‡* he laboured for God. But a
“trial approached for which he was totally unprepared. His
“family though governed with prudence and piety had wants
“which met with no adequate supply, and distresses of the most
“formidable kind presented themselves to his view. Still the nature of his office and the dispositions of his heart led him to pity and to aid the industrious poor, though many of their families were better provided for than his own. He gently pleaded
“with his brethren for suitable support, but he pleaded in vain;
“and finding his only resource was the labour of his hands, he
“was compelled to enter into business, which, though it relieved
“his temporal wants, soon involved his mind in perplexity and
“care. Now each day as it returned was necessarily devoted
“to worldly toil, and his studies (for he could not neglect
“them) sought the retreat which was afforded only by the midnight hour. Under the pressure of this accumulated burden his
“constitution in a few years gave way, and the church found
“ (though too late) that just as their pastor had reached the
“meridian of life, he had in the sacrifice of his health spent a
“treasure which could never be recalled. His people however had
“never been on the whole ungenerous. They had on the contrary, listened to every call of distress that of their minister
“excepted. They had raised each year for public charities
“twice as much as would have rescued their minister from all

* Luke xii. 42.

† Matt. xiii. 52.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

his troubles.—But (excepting an unheeded paper or two in the monthly publications) he had none to advocate his cause. He saw with pleasure the general cause of religion prosper, and calmly preparing for his great reward, (for ‘all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven’) he only sighed out in silence, ‘O that this people were wise! that they would consider in time how necessary it is to sustain the root if they expect the branches should flourish! How desirable that our churches should consider whether they do not hazard their best interests, and eventually their existence, by these untimely sacrifices of the comfort and usefulness of their pastors, while distant objects however worthy absorb all their attention.’

Permit us, brethren, to hope and believe that you will listen to these suggestions, as proceeding from motives that God approves. We must consider ourselves unfaithful to the cause of God, were we longer to survey a danger which if not steadily opposed may, in many instances, become fatal to the interest of religion among you: and if we could think it possible that one reader of these lines should impute our address to selfish motives, we should calmly refer ourselves and him to that day *when the secrets of all hearts shall be manifest**, and say, *Our rejoicing is this, even the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you ward†.*

Had we not already exceeded the usual limits of this address we should go on to caution you, brethren, against too readily associating with untried characters who hastily assume the ministerial office—We should beseech you to *try the spirits whether they be of God‡*—whether the same mind be in them which was in Christ Jesus§. We should exhort you to be exceedingly careful to *withdraw yourselves from every one that is called a brother and yet walketh disorderly§*—to attend to the discipline of your churches with meekness, firmness and impartiality; and to guard against that neglect by which after attention to discipline may become difficult if not impossible.—We should earnestly entreat also that you would cherish the highest gratitude to God for *that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free¶*; as well as the highest respect for the government and legislature of our country, under whose protection our religious liberties are continued to us uninterrupted and unimpaired.

* 1 Cor. xiv. 25. † 2 Cor. i. 12. ‡ 1 John iv. 1. ¶ Phil. ii. 5.
§ 2 Thess. iii. 6. ¶ Gal. v. 1.

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